

New preparedness guide

.....
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Kansas is smack-dab in the middle of tornado alley, due to the collision of winds from the arctic North and from the balmy Gulf of Mexico. It is prime ground for billowing super-cell thunderstorms, which may produce tornadoes. Many Kansas residents recognize this and prepare by means of family emergency plans. A transit agency needs to be prepared, too.

The National Weather Service may issue a tornado watch or tornado warning for your area during a strong storm. Knowing the difference between the two is essential. During a watch, the conditions for a tornado exist, but there is no tornado on the ground. During a tornado warning, either a funnel or a tornado on the ground has been spotted.

So how does a transit agency prepare for severe weather? It depends whether you're in the office or driving. Either way, pay attention to the conditions outside. Be aware of the alerts

that may occur around you, such as sirens or radio broadcasts.

In the office, designate a shelter in which to seek cover. The safest place is in an interior hallway on the lowest possible level, under a staircase, or in a designated shelter area. Use your arms and hands to protect your neck and head, and stay away from windows. The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture's *Disaster Handbook* recommends having a briefcase or small suitcase on hand to take important documents with you to shelter. The *Emergency Preparedness Guide for Transit Employees* by FTA and NTI suggests avoiding large open areas

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A tornado, Kansas' most violent natural occurrence, has an average speed of 30 mph, but can reach speeds above 250 mph. The tornado that destroyed Greensburg in May 2007 whipped around at 200 mph; however, most tornadoes (83 percent) are considered weak with winds of less than 110 mph, according to the National Climate Data Center.

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such as auditoriums and cafeterias, and to be aware that mobile structures will offer little-to-no protection from a tornado, even if tied down.

On the road, a bus driver should have discussed the weather conditions with a supervisor prior to beginning a shift. Open communication should be maintained, especially if the weather worsens. A bus should not accept riders if there is a tornado warning in effect, said Iowa's State Transportation Director Terry Voy, cited in a North Carolina School Bus Safety's Web site resource called *Tornado Preparedness*. If a tornado touches down en route, Voy says the driver should be aware of any possible shelters on the route, such as buildings, caves or any other strong structure to protect people. Do *not* take shelter under an overpass.

If a shelter cannot be found, the rider should locate a ditch on the side of the road and instruct riders to take cover in it. The bus should be parked far away from the people to prevent strong winds from blowing it onto them. Do not ever try to outrun a tornado.

At all times during a period of severe weather, communication should be maintained between the driver and an individual at the transit office if possible. If communication does not work due to storm damage, develop and know the policies and recommended steps of your office in a severe weather situation, and continue efforts to get in touch with the office after those steps have been carried out and also when you and your riders are secure.

A NOAA weather radio programmable for your service area is a low-cost investment to keep informed 24 hours a day, seven days a week on weather conditions and

more. Radios are plugged into the wall but tend to have a long battery life of around 30 hours in case power is knocked out by a storm. The weather radio alerts listeners to all hazards in the area, whether the emergency is natural such as a tornado, environmental like a chemical release, or public safety such as Amber Alerts. Weather radios can be purchased for as low as \$20 or as high as \$200, depending on how many features you desire. They are available at retail outlets or online merchants. It may be your only reliable source of weather updates when the power goes out.

To learn about severe weather by other sources, simply turn on the TV, radio, or Internet—directed to a weather Web site. All three will

always provide up-to-the-minute coverage on your area during severe weather. www.weather.com provides a nearly immediate local forecast after you type your zip code in.

Create a severe weather plan in your office with these suggestions, and have your employees learn it. It may protect the lives of your employees and your riders during tornado season.

Sources:

www.itre.ncsu.edu/ghsp/tornado.html

www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/ttl.pdf

University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture's *Disaster Handbook*, <http://disaster.ifas.ufl.edu/PDFS/CHAP10/D10-05.PDF> ▲

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What about larger groups?

If you have a larger group of people, it is possible to divide the group into sub-groups. Don't be tempted to make your work groups too large; stick with 4-8 people. If each person contributes 10 ideas, there soon will be too many to consider in a short period of time.

Allow all of the groups to work through the steps of the affinity process through creating headings. Once they have done that, each group can report out to the larger group to identify common themes or ideas. Headings that are identical or nearly identical from the various groups might be combined into one.

Setting priorities

You now have lots of ideas on how to proceed. What's the next step? One strategy is go through a prioritization exercise, providing each person with ten adhesive dots, all

receiving the same color. Each individual should be instructed to "vote" for their favorite ideas by affixing a dot or multiple dots next to the ideas that they favor. They can vote for ten ideas or they can vote for fewer multiple times, up to 10. Higher priority ideas start to emerge visually when you see an idea with lots of dots. Those priorities can be taken back to the office with the task to develop action plans around one or more of those higher priority ideas.

Getting more information on the affinity process

Information in this article was adapted from materials provided by Millennia Consulting, LLC, as part of the DePaul University Group Facilitation Certificate Program. For information on their Group Facilitation Certificate, visit <http://www.learning.depaul.edu/> ▲